DeLanglade First Permanent Resident in Green Bay Area

Long Record as Indian Leader Gave Him Fearsome Reputation Throughout Frontier

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(Second of a Series)

The Indians called him Aukewingeketauso—"Military Conqueror"—and the "Bravest of the Brave." To others he was a renegade, half-breed butcher who revelled in the bloody scalps of women and children. He is also known as the "father of Wisconsin" and the first permanent white settler at Green Bay. His real name was Charles Michel DeLanglade.

That he earned them all during and after the long struggle between France and England for possession of North America, there is no doubt. He was a leader of savage Indian raids and a good one; he was half-French, half-Indian; he was courageous and on occasion vicious. He loved battle, but he was neither a paladin nor a beast. DeLanglade was simply a product of his place and time.

Charles DeLanglade was born early in May, 1729, on Mackinac Island, the son of Augustin DeLanglade and an Ottawa woman whose brother was one of the principal war chiefs of her people. DeLanglade was not his father's family name—in fact, Augustin was the first to use it. As a youth his mother's Indian influence overshadowed his French background, although he received some formal education.

On War Path

When he was ten he participated in his first Indian raid, apparently as a mascot, and for the next quarter century he was continually on the war path, building a fearsome reputation as a leader of Indian war parties. He rocketed to fame in 1752 with a surprise swoop on the Miami River post of Pickawillany, an action that precipitated the final phase of the Hundred Years War, and from then until 1761 he ranged the frontier from Virginia to Quebec, spreading death and terror among the English outposts.

In 1755 DeLanglade achieved his greatest success as the architect of Braddock's Defeat. It was he who persuaded the discouraged French commander of Ft. Duquesne to use bushwhacking tactics against the overwhelmingly superior British army, he planned and organized the ambush, and fought brilliantly in it. Two years later, however, his reputation was forever blackened at the massacre of Ft. William Henry. He was not responsible for the outrage, but his failure to control his Indians gave him a black eye in the opinion of both French and British.

Although publicly reprimanded, he was quietly rewarded with the post of second in command at Mackinac. He was present and fought bravely at the fall of Quebec, then returned to Mackinac, which he formally surrendered to the British in 1761. Upon taking the oath of allegiance he was permitted to remain undisturbed there.

Warning Was Disregarded

DeLanglade warned the commandant of Pontiac's impending uprising but was disregarded. He was there when the Indians surprised and captured the post in June of 1763, although he did not know it was coming. He made no effort to stop it—in fact, he was powerless to do anything—but he later saved the prisoners from burning at the stake.

That same year he obtained permission to transfer to LaBaye and left Mackinac for his new home with his family and father. Some controversy pops up at this point over the exact date De Langlade settled permanently here. Traditional date was 1745, but many historians now doubt that he made the move before 1763. He and his father probably had a part-time trading post at Green Bay as early as 1745, but in the succeeding years De Langlade was war-whooping all over the west and most likely left his family at Mackinac.

DeLanglade, on arriving in Green Bay, built an extensive trading establishment and home at the foot of what is now Doty St. and "settled down" to a routine trader's life, interspersed with frequent trips in his capacity as Indian commissioner for the British. When the Revolution broke out, however, the old fire-eater, now crowding 50, unsheathed his war hatchet and offered his services to England.

He appeared with a large body of warriors at the headquarters of Gen. Burgoyne as the latter was starting on the ill-fated march that ended in surrender at Saratoga, but Burgoyne politely turned him down. During the war he conducted several raids but none were very successful, and he eventually returned to Green Bay. It was his last fling. He had participated in 99 battles and skirmishes in his long career, and in his old age he used to gripe good-naturedly that he wished he could get in just one more and make it an even 100.

In 1754 DeLanglade married Charlotte Bourassa at Mackinac. Charlotte was a strikingly beautiful woman, 15 years his junior, and she outlived him by 18 years. Their daughter Domitelle married Pierre Grignon Sr., a union that began the Grignon dynasty in Wisconsin. By an earlier marriage he had a son, Charles Jr., whom he educated carefully and who served in the British forces with distinction in the War of 1812.

Growth Was Peaceful

DeLanglade's fame was a deterrent to Wisconsin Indians who might have made trouble, and the little settlement grew slowly and peacefully. In fact, so great was his reputation that only a few months before his death a rumor that he was coming down the Mississippi scared the pants off the Spaniards at New Orleans.

Early in March—some say it was January—1800, he contacted a severe cold, one of the few illnesses in his long and arduous life, and within two weeks he was dead at the age of 71. He was buried somewhere in the old Catholic cemetery, just north of what is now the intersection of Adams and Doty Streets.

DeLanglade was a powerful, stocky man, about five feet ten, with very broad shoulders and a round, expressive face. Piercing black eyes peered from beneath bushy eyebrows. He became partly bald in middle age, and what remained of his once jet-black hair turned white in his last years. When he got all duked out in his scarlet British uniform as head of the local militia he cut an impressive figure.

In character and manner he is described as a mild and patient man but one who could not brook an insult. He was an outstanding leader of white men as well as Indians, and he could inspire respect and confidence in his leadership. Every record testifies to his rigid honesty.